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28/9/2009

Dear Alice,

ALT comments on the JISC 2010-2012 Strategy Draft

Following the meeting of ALT's Central Executive Committee which you attended to discuss the JISC 2010-2012 Strategy on 25/6/2009, we are pleased to comment further on the current draft[1]. Thank you very much for giving us a working day's grace to do so.

We note that the document is still "work in progress" with further meetings and refinements to be undertaken. Our comments are therefore to be read as suggestions from a partner organisation for further work in some areas rather than as a detailed critique or as proposals for definitive changes to detailed text.

Accordingly we have divided our comments into substantive comments on content and those which concern further polish as the drafting progresses.

Substantive comments on content

1. The draft has improved significantly on its predecessor and we are in broad agreement with most of it.

2. Section 2 – Our World/Context contains all the right material but currently reads too much as if the next three years and beyond will be essentially all about cost savings. A more balanced and upbeat approach would be to put the changes in technology and infrastructure earlier (first), making the strategy rather more positive in tone, and then lead into the two areas of funding and environments. Section 2 would then read firstly as if HE&FE is being and will be further helped by JISC to change in step with the developments in social networking, new devices, "always on" connections etc. The section could then note that the community and the regimes in which institutions must function are changing too, in a way that aligns with the trends, so that JISC's work is of fundamental importance in improving things for learners, teachers, researchers, administrators and institutional leaders, at a minimal cost, at a crucial time of ongoing austerity!

3. Saying that student infrastructure demands are largely met should be qualified with "current". It would make sense to include the statement, or at least the implication, that future demands (which will change in their nature as well as probably increase) will need to be met in institutions, with JISC well placed to do/support, given its previous track record.

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[1] This document was written by John Slater and Seb Schmoller, with input from ALT's Central Executive Committee, and members of ALT's operational committees, in particular Steve Ryan, Gilly Salmon, Alexandre Borovik, Carol Higgison, and Haydn Blackey.

4. In this regard the ALT community perceives a significant (architectural and social) shift in what is happening in learning and teaching, in the reliance of students on ICT services, and in the way in which knowledge is created and mediated: in short in the socio-technical and political environments. Surprisingly, JISC appears to perceive rather fewer and perhaps less fundamental changes in the Section 2, making very limited mentions of Open Source, and no mentions of IPR or of the impact the Web is having on academic publishing. Nor does this section situate the work of JISC against that of other entities in the same space: the omission of any reference to Becta, for example, needs to be put right.

5. Whilst we do not suggest JISC adopts any sort of "breathless" tone in the Section 2, we do believe that JISC would be well advised at this juncture to talk explicitly about the fact of an architectural shift or sea-change being underway, and to intimate that in such circumstances there is great scope for institutions to fall behind the game and/or waste public money, something which JISC is well placed to mitigate. Certainly the shift may happen faster if the need to economise is a driver, as it will force people out of old expensive habits (such as only having technology-enhanced learning as an add-on). All of this could be due for the conclusion, but it needs to be seeded early in the document.

6. We remain of the view that the 3 column tables in <u>Section 5 – Priority Investment Areas</u> have the wrong headings. The first column heading is fine but we suggest that the second be labelled something like *"Coming soon (work that is now of most interest to innovators and early adopters with more general uptake in 2-4 years)"* and the third, say, *"On the Horizon (longer term investment with impact in 3-8 years)"*. We acknowledge that next year's General Election and the current financial pressures will naturally produce a short-termism; but this is a 3 year strategy, so the tables, in particular, will need to be fit for purpose throughout the strategy's lifetime. However the columns are labelled, they need to be evenly and credibly populated with activities/investment areas that will make sense to the strategy's intended audience. We do not think this is as yet the case – partly because some activities are inappropriately positioned (e.g. "information literacy" is surely a here and now problem) – and partly because some of them are not sufficiently defined or explained in terms that stakeholders will understand (e.g. "network services to support exchange of data between e-learning systems", which may also be in the wrong column).

7. It is such a key to not wasting public funding that making sure that the evidence from research in learning technology are made available and brought to bear across the sector efficiently, effectively and in a timely fashion should feature in either the teaching and learning the research tables, and probably both, with appropriate cross-referencing. This would serve to beef up the first and second columns of the teaching and learning table. If the crucial staff-development aspect of learning technology has been ceded elsewhere, this should be made clear.

8. In several cases in the three column tables the word "examples" is used. We think it should be replaced by "exemplars" or "case studies", in either case evidence-based.

9. The first paragraph in research in the middle column "Support an increase in the quantity of research in the UK" is weak – it is likely that the quality of research will be more important than the quantity at a time of diminishing budgets. JISC can have most impact in ensuring that our researchers in key disciplines stay ahead of the (international) game. It is important to lead on quality, data management and new research environments, and let the quantity follow.

10. The role of JISC in identifying and importing best practice and trialling it in a UK environment and sharing internationally such things as digitisation costs (e.g. UK digitisation of assets which are likely to be of value elsewhere in the developed world) needs to come over more strongly to readers. Similarly, the European and international outreach needs to be strengthened in the document. The "world" of Section 2 is, apart from a nod to Bologna, largely a UK one. Some analysis of the international situation as part of Section 2 would not be out of place.

11. We are sceptical about the value in the strategy of the innovation lifecycle section. It seems to add little except some basic underpinning that readers who have got this far might be assumed to have; and it presents the danger that JISC is seen to nail its colours to a particular innovation framework that might prove burdensome or just plain unhelpful during the lifetime of the strategy. In any case, the use of terms like "semi-radical" is best avoided. Can the section be replaced by the first three paragraphs followed by a risk statement along the lines of the last sentence? Indeed the whole section could reasonably then be absorbed into Section 8 – Measuring Success, which generally reads well.

Points relating to further polish

12. Decide upfront whether there be one or more (e.g. two) "sectors" (e.g. HE and FE) and stick to the decision throughout the document.

13. Make the use of colons, semicolons and commas consistent (and preferably also consistent with good usage).

14. Page 5 line 3: for "economy" read "economies".

15. Page 5 para 2, second sentence: attend to the inconsistent use of colons, commas and semi-colons.

16. Numbered rather than bulleted lists in the tables will assist cross-referencing.

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